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ABSTRACT

This report examines local school-to-work partnerships in Pennsylvania and summarizes the lessons that can be learned from them. It includes information on how local partnerships work, functions of local school-to-work partnerships, and partnership activities such as establishing educator in the workplace opportunities, making business connections, developing career awareness programs, providing student work experiences, operating student camps, improving school district communication, organizing workshops and seminars, developing regional career-related skills, and developing curriculum. A table outlining the type of program, description, participation, and school-to-work partnership for nine programs in the state is included. (KC)

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# Local School-to-Work Partnerships: Early Lessons from Pennsylvania

by

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**Introduction**

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) was signed into law by President Clinton in 1994. This legislation provides 5-year grants to the states for the establishment of school-to-work (STW) systems based on statewide and local STW partnerships. The statewide partnerships, which include representatives from the governor's office, relevant state agencies, and a broad spectrum of nongovernmental public and private organizations, receive the STWOA funds from the federal government and then redistribute them to local partnerships.

Local partnerships are typically composed of 6 or more school districts (Hershey, Hudis, Silverberg, and Haimson, 1997) and a cross-section of local organizations from the profit and nonprofit sectors. Their primary goal is to establish STW systems encompassing the participating districts and schools. These systems may include preexisting programs but must be more comprehensive and coherent than earlier STW efforts. The goal is to provide students in every school with the ability to choose among a variety of school- and work-based learning experiences leading to defined postsecondary education or employment opportunities. To provide a consistent overall framework, the STWOA specifies that local systems must eventually include school-based learning, work-based learning, and connecting activities.

The local partnership model is based on the idea that there are significant economies of scale in the provision of STW programming and therefore that groups of districts working together on relatively large projects will accomplish more than single districts working by themselves on smaller projects. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of what local partnership activities have been the most successful thus far in Pennsylvania and to provide references for those who wish further details. Pennsylvania STW programs were selected to be highlighted because the state is large and encompasses diverse communities ranging from large cities to very rural areas. In addition, Pennsylvania has many well documented STW programs which are typical of other states' programs. The specific examples given are taken from LSS's experience working with local partnerships in the Philadelphia metropolitan area

and from *School-to-Work: Examples that Work, A Collection of Effective Pennsylvania Practices* (1998). Information about local partnership practices in other states comes mainly from Partners in Progress: Early Steps in Creating School-to-Work Systems, a research report published by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (Hershey, et al., 1997). General principles for building successful STW programs at the school level may be found in LSS Spotlight, *School-to-Work: What Works in Schools* (Stull, 1998).

**How Local Partnerships Work**

As soon as a state has established a statewide partnership and begun to receive STWOA funds, local partnerships are formed. The local partnerships can then begin to apply for grants. Each state sets its own guidelines for local partnership structure and the grant application process. To be eligible for funding, local partnerships typically have to show that school districts are committed to the project, that at least some local businesses are active participants in the enterprise, and that the planned activities and projects will be of sufficient scale to benefit students in multiple schools and/or districts. Once a local partnership has met these criteria and received funding, the state appoints a grants facilitator who works with the partnership to implement the STW system it has proposed.

In Pennsylvania, the Department of Education works with schools through a system of local organizations known as Intermediate Units (IU's). Twenty-nine IU's across the state provide support services such as special education programs, teacher training opportunities, computer facilities, and on-line access to the 501 public school districts, as well as to non-public schools. Each IU services from 12 to 25 school districts except for the School District of Philadelphia, which operates its own IU. This organizational model gave Pennsylvania an established structure for implementing local STW partnerships in that school districts are already connected to one another by belonging to IU's. Consequently, many local partnerships are organized by an IU and consist of the school districts served by the IU in cooperation with outside organizations concerned with educational improvement. The latter

include private business firms, industrial resource centers, business-education partnerships, and area vocational-technical schools.

**Functions Of Local STW Partnerships**

As noted above, the rationale for the local partnership structure is based on the idea that STW programming can be delivered more effectively if at least some activities are provided at an organizational level above that of the individual school or district. This increase in effectiveness can come about for a variety of reasons.

- First, a local partnership can serve as a communication link connecting the participating schools and districts. In this capacity, the partnership can speed the flow of information about successful practices from one school or district to another. It can also gather and disseminate STW information from outside sources more efficiently than can be done at the level of the individual school.
- Second, a local partnership can organize STW activities that need to draw students from multiple schools or districts in order to achieve the minimum scale necessary for efficient operation. For example, a specialized training program at a local business may only be attractive to one or two students at any single school. By making such a program available to students from multiple schools, a partnership can create sufficient demand to ensure its success.
- Third, a local partnership can simplify the task of establishing STW links between individual schools and local businesses. Very often, schools do not have the resources or contacts necessary to reach out effectively to local businesses. Local partnerships, in part because business representatives sit on their board, typically have these resources or contacts. In addition, in providing services to

students, individual businesses typically prefer working with a central organization rather than a multitude of individual schools.

- Fourth, a local partnership includes representation from a broad range of industry and therefore has more knowledge about appropriate regional industry clusters for curriculum development than do individual schools. Participating businesses can then be involved with schools in writing standards and identifying industry skills.

The end result is that the local partnership structure greatly expands the information and opportunities available to individual schools seeking to establish STW programs. Schools have access to a larger number of industry options and workplace experiences for their students and greater information about effective practices elsewhere than if they were working entirely on their own. The next section describes the types of programs that have been successful in Pennsylvania. All of these programs perform one or more of the above partnership functions for participating schools.

**Partnership Activities**

The types of programs described in this section have been undertaken by a variety of local partnerships in Pennsylvania, and elsewhere, with considerable success. In all cases, coordination at the local partnership level has given individual teachers, districts, and schools opportunities that they would not have had working on their own. Table 1 provides a list of exemplary STW programs and activities of local partnerships around the state. In the table, specific examples are grouped by type of program and include the name of the organizing partnership. A detailed explanation of each type of program is included in this section.

Establishing Educator in the Workplace Opportunities

Educator in the Workplace programs provide work site experience for teachers. Their primary goal is to expose teachers to business issues and to increase their awareness of the skills necessary for successful employment. Some programs put teachers in the workplace for periods as long as an entire summer. In other programs the experience is of shorter duration, sometimes only a single day. The outcome is that greater knowledge of business operations, career opportunities, and the daily demands of the workplace will enable teachers to better prepare their students for the real world of work. The most effective programs require teachers to develop lesson plans based on their workplace experiences. Participating teachers also often prepare staff development programs for their colleagues based on their workplace experiences. In all cases, local partnerships institute the Educator in the Workplace opportunities for teachers.

Making Business Connections

Many partnerships have established ongoing links between educators and local business in order to foster easy communication. Programs have business representatives serving on boards which visit schools and classrooms regularly. Partnerships also sponsor events that foster on-going dialogue between teachers and employers. The local partnership contacts businesses and facilitates the communication with schools.

Developing Career Awareness Programs

The STWOA mandates that participating schools provide career awareness activities in the K-12 curriculum. According to an in-depth survey covering eight states by Mathematica, Inc. (Hershey, 1997), such activities are the most common form of STW programming. To provide career awareness more efficiently, many local partnerships in Pennsylvania and elsewhere are developing career awareness

materials and/or organizing career awareness activities and then making them available to all districts and schools in the partnership. Many partnerships have developed collections of career awareness materials available at either central locations within the partnership region or on a web site developed by the partnership. Partnerships also arrange for local business representatives to visit school and give, in classrooms, during assemblies, and on career days, presentations which describe alternative career paths.

Providing Student Work Experiences

Partnerships draw students from many school districts and place them in a variety of programs from full paid internships to job shadowing experiences. Because the local partnership is involved, these opportunities are available to many more students. Some partnerships have made the provision of student work experiences and student participation a requirement of the STW program.

Operating Student Camps

Intensive career exploration is made possible for students through summer camps. These camps rely heavily on the participation of local business. They give students the opportunity to experience an in-depth look at one or several careers. Because they are arranged at the partnership level, students also have the opportunity to meet students from neighboring school districts and businesses have the opportunity to reach a larger number of students.

Improving School District Communication

Many partnerships have assembled collections of STW best practice materials drawn from the experiences of schools and districts both within and outside the partnership. These publications typically include not only descriptions of individual projects, but also a variety of supporting materials such as forms, letters, curriculum links, and evaluations by both students and teachers.

Organizing Workshops/Seminars

In addition to providing information in printed form, partnerships often conduct best practice seminars and workshops for a broad spectrum of STW participants such as teachers, school administrators, parents, and employers. These programs serve many purposes for local partnerships: the ability to share developed materials and programs among school districts; the opportunity to keep the lines of communication open between educators and local businesses; and an occasion to promote the STW initiative.

Developing Regional Career Related Skills

The development of career clusters is integral to the STW model and mandated by the STWOA. Local partnerships are able to provide the information and resources necessary to schools in order to develop realistic career clusters. The participation of area business in this process is vital to its success. Partnerships have put together teams composed of both educators and business people to outline skills that are focused on specific occupations or industries prominent in their region.

Developing Curriculum

There is a need to create new curriculum materials to enhance the school-based learning component of STW programs. Often, these materials are based on the general competencies and specific skills identified in the SCANS report (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991). Local partnerships have frequently taken the lead in helping to prepare these materials. In some cases, partnerships merely provide financial support to educators to write the appropriate manuals and lesson plans. In other cases, partnerships have been involved in the development of project-based curriculum development.



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**Concluding Remarks**

Local STW partnerships are just beginning to have a significant impact on the STW programs of individual schools and districts. Exemplary, on-going STW programs have been developed as a result of the local partnership model established in Pennsylvania. Partnerships have instituted many valuable programs for teachers and students, established connections with local businesses, and initiated STW curriculum revisions. These programs are typical of those in other states. (Hershey, et al., 1997) The longevity of these programs beyond the STWOA funding remains to be seen, however, if educators, businesses, students, and parents see a benefit to the economic development of their communities, continued local support for these initiatives is possible.

**Table 1: Exemplary STW Partnership Programs in Pennsylvania**

| Type of Program | Description | Participation | STW Partnership |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Establishing Educator in the Workplace** | Teachers work in area industry<br>*Resulting lesson plans include business representative as guest speaker and are published in book form for distribution to school* | | Lawrence County STW Partnership |
| | Week long internship for teachers<br>*Teachers create an inventory of types of skills they observe on the job* | 120 educators from 13 school districts | Seneca Highlands IU |
| **Making Business Connections** | Created In-house Business Boards for each school district<br>*Each board works directly to meet needs of its school district* | | Clearfield/Jefferson STW Partnership |
| | Industry/Educator Luncheon<br>*Develops ongoing relationships including classroom visits* | 145 teachers<br>26 businesses | Indiana County STW Office |
| **Developing Career Awareness Programs** | Local newspaper sponsors weekly supplements highlighting a specific career<br>*Career information is specialized to include local employers and schools* | 49 weekly supplements<br>2500 copies distributed | Erie Area STW Local Partnership & Erie Times |
| | Tech Rec program is an after-school voluntary activity for middle school students<br>*Students explore various careers in the spirit of recreation* | | Schuylkill STW Partnership |
| **Providing Student Work Experiences** | County-wide Shadowing, Unpaid Internships, Apprenticeships and Cooperative Education<br>*All students participate* | 700 students<br>300 Businesses | Sommerset County STW Partnership |
| | Job shadowing experience over an eight week period<br>*Students shadow a different department each time* | 96 students<br>41 businesses | Cambia County STW Connection |
| **Operating Student Camps** | Week long career camp focusing on seven career areas<br>*Camp is for 5th, 6th & 7th grade students* | 70 students (10 per career cluster) | Blair County STW |
| | Career Quest is a week long camp that looks at four career areas<br>*Camp for 7th, 8th & 9th graders and students do related assignments during the year* | 45 students | Clinton County STW |
| **Improving School District Communication** | A database of employer commitment<br>Developed with support from Chamber of Commerce | | Snyder County STW Partnership |
| | *Lesson plans developed from Educator in the Workplace*<br>Available via the Internet and published in book form | 70 lesson plans | Erie Area STW Local Partnership |
| **Organizing Workshops & Seminars** | County Wide In-Service Day focusing on STW initiative and its importance in the school<br>*Participants included elementary, middle & high school teachers, counselors and school board members* | 1300 | Lycoming County STW Partnership |
| **Developing Regional Career Related Skills** | Development of work keys occupational profiles by advisory committees for each of the six regional industry clusters<br>*Business partners work with educators on industry skill standards* | 121 employers | Southwestern Pennsylvania Connection |
| **Writing Curriculum** | All high schools and Vo-Tech develop business plans and operate entrepreneurial projects -<br>*Entrepreneurial Subcommittee acts as consultants and "Shareholders" for all projects* | 5 high schools, 1 Vo-Tech 7 projects operating | Mercer County STW Partnership |

*Italic print indicates reason project was selected for inclusion in chart.*



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Pennsylvania Department of Education School-to-Work Office. (1998). *School-to-Work: Examples that Work, A Collection of Effective Pennsylvania Practices.*

Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. (1991). *What Work Requires: A SCANS Report for America 2000.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.

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## Web Sites


Southwestern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center. Includes announcements, calendar of events, resource library with Internet links, Discussion Room, Library of Effective Practices and an Employer Opportunity Bank. Available: http://www.swpa-connection.org/

National STW. Includes a search function by type of program and provides links to all state web sites including Pennsylvania. Available: http://www.stw.edu.gov/

North West Regional Research Laboratory. Contains several articles documenting STW and its educational impact. Available: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/nwrrl/default.htm